WST 4800-001: Non-western Feminisms: Gender, Culture, and Nation

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Course Description:
Since the mid-1980s, non-western women feminists have been challenging the commonly held assumptions about non-western women, both in the East as well as in the West, by contesting old conceptions and paradigms and experimenting with new methodologies and views. In this course, we will consider the major social concerns and theoretical issues raised in the non-western feminist discourses, including literary works, by women from India, China, and the Middle East. Through their writings, we will explore issues of gender in relation to culture, class, race, and nation/nationality. We will then go on to study the impact of these issues on the treatment and position of women in these non-western countries. In analyzing the literary writings of Asian and Middle Eastern women, we will trace some of the ways in which they complicate, critique, and subvert their cultural ideologies and the essentialist conceptions of their agency as perceived by their patriarchal societies. Some of the questions that we will pursue are the following: How do issues of ‘gender’ and ‘identity’ manifest in these texts? How do non-western women define the term ‘feminist emancipation’? Are their definitions homogeneous? In what ways do gender issues further nuance postcolonial negotiations in their writings? What are the ideals/values posited for non-western women by their respective societies? What is the rationale behind their acceptance and negation?

Course Requirements:
One midterm exam: 20%
One mid-term paper, 5-6 pages: 25%
One final paper, 7-8 pages: 30%
One class presentation on a single topic or work: 15%
Active Preparation and Class Participation: 10%

Texts Required:
Anita Desai. Where Shall We Go This Summer?
Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism
Geeta Dharmarajan (ed.) Separate Journeys
Hanan Al-Shaykh. The Story of Zahra
Kalidasa. The Loom of Time
Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History
Nawaal El Saadawi Woman at Point Zero
N. J. Dawood (ed.). The Koran
Stephen Alter and Wimal Dissanayake (ed.). The Penguin Book of Modern Indian Short Stories
Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. Women Writing in India, Volume II
Zhang Jie. “Love Must Not Be Forgotten”
Course Policies:
The course format will be informal lecture and exploratory discussion. Class participation, therefore, will be a significant component of this course. Your presence in the class is important for everyone, but especially for you. Each unexcused absence will bring your final grade down by 1%. Three late appearances will equal one unexcused absence.

Papers are due at the beginning of the class on the day they are due. For each day that the paper is late, the letter grade will fall by one full grade; an ‘A’ essay due on Friday will be an ‘F’ by next Thursday.

Plagiarism Policy (English Department):
Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism – “the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author and representation of them as one’s own original work” (Random House Dictionary of the English Language) – has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

Information for Students with Disabilities:
If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Tentative Syllabus

Week 1

1/8 – Introduction to the Course
1/10 – Anita Desai’s “A Devoted Son” from The Penguin Book of Modern Indian Short Stories

Week 2

1/15 – Ashapurna Devi’s “Izzat” from Separate Journeys: Short Stories by Contemporary Indian Women
1/17 – Partha Chatterjee’s “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question” from Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History

Week 3

1/22 – Chhaya Datar’s “In Search of Myself” from Women Writing in India, Volume II
1/24 – continued, Anita Desai’s Where Shall We Go This Summer?

Week 4

1/29 – continued
1/31 – continued, Kalidasa’s Abhijnanasakuntalam from The Loom of Time
Week 5

2/5 – Vaidehi’s “An Afternoon with Shakuntala” from Women Writing in India
2/7 – continued

Week 6

2/12 – Review for the Midterm Exam
2/14 – Midterm Exam

Week 7

2/19 – Zhang Jie’s “Love Must Not Be Forgotten”
2/21 – Eileen Chung’s “The Golden Cangue”

Week 8

2/26 – continued
2/28 – Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s “Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism” from Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism

Week 9

3/4 – continued
3/6 – The Koran, Mid-term Paper due

Week 10

3/18 - Nawaal El-Saadawi’s Woman at Point Zero
3/20 - Continued

Week 11

3/25 – Hanan Al Shaykh’s The Story of Zahra
3/27 - continued

Week 12

4/1 – Cheryl Johnson-Odim’s “Common Themes, Different Contexts: Third World Women and Feminism” from Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism
4/3 – continued, Popati Hiranandani’s “I a Woman” (Handout)

Week 13

4/8 – Theorizing Non-Western Feminisms and Comparing East-West Feminisms
4/10 – Conferences for the Final Paper and Class Presentation
**Week 14**

4/15 - Conferences  
4/17 - Class Presentations

**Week 15**

4/22 - Class Presentations  
4/24 – Review, Final Paper due